



Cheri Quickmire, Executive Director of Common Cause in Connecticut

Testimony before the Government Administration and Elections Committee

March 17, 2014

Regarding:

SB 455 AAC the Citizens' Election Fund

SB 453 AAC State Party Federal Accounts

Chairmen Musto and Jutila, Senator McLachlan, Representative Hwang and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. My name is Cheri Quickmire and I am the Executive Director of Common Cause in Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

Common Cause in Connecticut is a nonpartisan, nonprofit citizen lobby that works to improve the way Connecticut's government operates. Common Cause has worked for four decades in Connecticut and worked with the General Assembly and many governors to pass strong freedom of information laws, election reforms that open up our electoral system to broader participation, campaign finance and disclosure reforms, and common sense ethics reforms. We have more than 400,000 members around the country and 35 state chapters. We have approximately 7200 members and activists in Connecticut.

SB 455 AAC the Citizens' Election Fund

As you know, Common Cause supports the Citizens' Election Program and the opportunities it provides for candidates without unlimited personal wealth or access to networks of financial resources to run for office. We agree that the functioning of the CEF – the distribution of funds to all qualifying candidates would be enhanced by expanding overdraft protection of the fund.

We agree that this expansion of overdraft protection would help ensure that adequate funds are in the Fund to pay grants for those candidates who qualify. It is an answer to a cash flow problem with the fund, particularly since there was a 40 percent reduction to the amount deposited in the CEF from the general fund in 2011. We recommend passage of the bill.

SB 453 AAC State Party Federal Accounts

I have concerns about the potential problems this proposal will create for Connecticut's campaign finance laws. Considerable time and resources have gone into creating a system that is successful and that has moved the public perception of the Connecticut of corrupticut to Connecticut, the clean-election state. This appears to be additional chipping away at the restrictions put in place to prevent manipulation of the system.

SEEC issued an Advisory Opinion comparing current law and the proposals of the bill before you. It advises that this bill may be read to change CT law to allow up to 50% of money spent on staff and other permissible expenses including Organization Expenditures that support or oppose candidates in statewide elections. This money may originate from CT state contractors and lobbyists contributing to the federal account. **This not currently permitted in statute and we believe the law should not be changed to allow an influx of cash from state contractors and lobbyists.** Considering recent rulings by the Supreme Court of the United States CT campaign finance laws have been adjusted and currently permit Organization Expenditures be made to the state party in unlimited amounts to support statewide candidates. Concerns about Independent Expenditures have raised the bar that was set by the General Assembly and recent use of IEs by outside interests only exacerbated that concern.

We see this as a gimmick that will only promote additional opportunities for special interest access that is currently prohibited. Other adjustments should be considered including more rigorous disclosure of outside campaign spending that includes amounts spent and digs deeper into spenders.

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